

My name is Lindsey Beck, I am 26 years old, and I have been a resident of Connecticut my entire life. I became ill when I was around 16; however my life was such that I was in no position to seek medical attention. At age 18, I finally saw a gastroenterologist in order to attempt to figure out why I was losing so much blood through my bowels as well as having other digestive issues. The result was inconclusive, with follow-up appointments needed, but unfortunately I never made them. It was not until I was 21 that I found out that I have Crohn's disease, which causes me a great deal of physical pain, has inhibited my ability to eat most everything, and has no cure. A month later, in December 2005, I was also diagnosed with cervical cancer. At age 15 I had already been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which has complicated matters with my Crohn's (due to the anxiety one experiences who has this disorder), causing more flair-ups (the time when the Crohn's is 'active'). Additionally, about three years ago I was also diagnosed with Fibromyalgia; again, the PTSD impacts the frequency and severity of pain from this disorder. It is due to these medical conditions that I write this testimony, in hopes of explaining how the current method of treatment for pain through narcotics does not work for everybody (for most, in fact, it becomes simply another problem), and it is necessary to show sympathy for those who seek out the alternative of marijuana.

I will begin by presenting you with a summary of my history since age 13, as this is of the utmost importance when trying to understand my medical conditions fully. Before beginning, however, I would first like to present a question for you to ponder, as all I have to say becomes irrelevant in light of a compassionate answer. Part of human life is suffering and pain, the payoff being joy and pleasure; however, is it not our obligation as a species that can show compassion to wish the minimal amount of suffering upon each individual? If only this were enough, I could save myself the burden of baring my life, yet I realize that in this reality, such questions never seem to be enough.

Age 13 is when I met my first addict. He was my father. He had become seriously injured at work, causing his permanent disability. It was at this time that the famed Oxycotin hit the market. My father had two ruptured discs in his back, so they treated him with this new 'miracle' drug for the pain. As happened to many others, his medication was changed once the full impact of this drug was realized. However, none of these alternatives worked on my father's pain. He ended up turning to crack-cocaine and heroin, a man in his fifties who had never used illicit drugs and gave up drinking in his twenties. Eventually, the heroin addiction took full control. My parents then divorced after 26 years of marriage, causing a collapse in our family that I could have never anticipated. At age 16 my father overdosed. I was with him when this happened. I felt that I had to take care of my father despite his condition and how he chose to treat it; this came much to my own expense I now realize, but also taught me some valuable life lessons I will be forever grateful for. My father's girlfriend was also a heroin addict; she died from blood poisoning due to a dirty needle when I was 17. My father decided to move to the Midwest once I graduated high school in order to get sober. He has now been sober for eight years, but the impacts of the drugs had a permanent effect on his health.

I am telling you of my father because I feel that his experience closely correlates to that of my own. I have never used heroin, nor plan to, however the medication I was on had all the same effects. After having observed personally what heroin does to the human condition, not just in my father and his girlfriend, but also the group of people he associated with at that time as well. Therefore, in my opinion, I have the 'qualifications' necessary to make the connection between what I experienced and what I saw them experience, from the comatose effect on the brain and body, to the excruciating and dangerous withdrawals.

When I was first diagnosed, I was a martyr to my pain. I did not want to touch the pain medication specifically because of what I had seen happen in my life because of it. However, after about a year and a half, several procedures, allergic reactions, 'new-and-improved' drugs that never worked, and countless days spent curled in the fetal position unable to move, I succumbed to this treatment. It was my desire to continue work, college, and of course most importantly, an active role in

my son's life. I did not realize that what I would get was a wheelchair and stupefied to the point of not being able to function in the most basic of circumstances.

I cannot explain to you objectively what happened to me because of the narcotics that were prescribed to me by the pain management clinic. I have written this so many different ways in order to try and do just that; however, the fact is that what happened to me does make me feel as though I were betrayed by an institution that was suppose to help me, not hurt me. I have few memories outside of my bedroom for two years of my life- two very significant years, as my son is young and I will never get this time with him back. Even before this, I am sure that the medication was causing negative effects that I will never fully understand, but was obvious to those closest to me in the personality change that slowly took place. In the two years that I spent so incapacitated, the few times I did leave the house in attempts to run errands or go to the doctors, I was unable to drive, as well as dependent on a wheelchair in order to move. Once to my destination, I managed little more than a half an hour before I would become so drenched in sweat from the side effects of the narcotics that I would have to leave or face the real possibility of losing consciousness in public. There were several occasions at home where this did happen- anytime I had to use my body, whether to take a shower or use the bathroom, I always became dizzy and light headed. So much of this time seems to be not much more than a blur. My thoughts were jumbled and incomprehensible even to myself. The most vivid memories I have are ones of pain, frustration, and guilt at my inability to be the active mom that I had been. I sunk into a deep depression, and I know it took all the love I have for my son in order to pull myself out of it. It was also at this time that I had hit my point of most despair, thinking that nothing would change or get better, knowing that this was not the kind of life worth living. If I had continued on that path, I hate to think about what my future might have offered. I had been assigned the same life as that of a heroin addict, except my drugs were given to me free of charge and approved by the government.

The withdrawals were very severe. I have witnessed the withdrawals experienced by those on heroin. It would seem as if the sobering individual were going insane, ranting madly and then sliding into despair, then back again. I have witnessed this to its completion, and on more than one occasion. The longest withdrawal I can remember someone having usually lasted up to ten days. I would never believe that there could be a worse substance to come off of, except I have now had the experience of narcotic withdrawals, which seem no different. In fact, my withdrawals seemed to continue for over a month, causing me at some points to truly question my own sanity. If I told you that it never crossed my mind at this time that I might not make it back to the real me, I would be lying. Having recorded so much of my withdrawals, I can go back and watch what was happening to me, and I can honestly say that I have never witnessed a heroin withdrawal that could compare. I went over fifteen days with almost no food able to stay in my stomach; I had to struggle in order to keep myself hydrated; and the madness I felt I do not desire to try and describe.

Of all my current fears, the worst is that I would end up in legal trouble due to my marijuana use and be forced to make a decision between a lifetime of chronic pain or narcotics. I am here today in order to ask you for something that most would never have to- please let me have some quality to my life. I can accept the hand that I have been dealt, all I want is to be allowed to at least try and live it with some dignity and substance. I just want to raise my son, go back to college, and have a career; at the most basic, just to enjoy a meal. I would at the very least think that as a human being in this society that I deserve a chance to try. I realize that there is opposition to this bill, but in my opinion, the opposition would do better to battle the pharmaceutical companies' use of narcotics as their main weapon against pain. I will never comprehend the individual who tells me that I can be on all the opiates they prescribed, but that the joint I smoke is dangerous. As a mother I can say with absolute resolve that if this illness should ever befall my own child, I only wish that he never has to battle like me in order to simply live. And that is all I want, to have my life back, to be allowed to actually live. I beg of you, please do not deny me of this most basic of natural rights.